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ABSTRACT

Discussed are issues in the identification of culturally different gifted children in urban areas with particular emphasis on state policy in Georgia. Considered are the need for earlier identification to prevent a decline in academic achievement, the definition and criteria for gifted children according to Georgia state policy, varieties of identification measures, and questions to consider when building identification and special education programs for culturally different gifted children. (DB)

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EARLY IDENTIFICATION IND INTERVENTION OF THE CULTURALLY DIFFERENT GIFTED IN AN URBAN ENVIRONMENT

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INTRODUCTION AND RATIONALE

The needs of children from the economically deprived and culturally different families are currently a matter of very broad national attention, for there can be little doubt that one of our nation's greatest sources of untapped potential is to be found among the many individuals from lower socioeconomic levels. These children suffer many deprivations which make achievement in school difficult for them.

Educators do not adequately understand the dimensions of academic giftedness in urban, culturally different populations. They are unable to validly identify gifted children from low income, disadvantaged families, both because the concept of "giftedness" has not been clearly delienated and because traditional identification procedures have been only marginally effective. Efforts to identify gifted children among the culturally different have been seriously handicapped by the lack of tests and screening procedures that will give these children a fair chance to perform in a gifted manner.

The logical point at which gifted children should be recognized and their needs met is at school entry. The young gifted child enters school with eager anticipation; but typically, before long, he will have progressed to a level at which he is almost certain to encounter frustration and difficulties. Because he is more than ordinarily skilled in learning and enjoys learning, his frustration when his learning is impeded is greater than is the case with other children. And because he wants his teacher's approval, his ambivlent feelings and actions cause turmoil for himself as well as for the teacher. He must be identified and his potential maximized.

THE PROBLEM AND THE NEED

Earlier Identification. There has been a well-documented, geometric decline, across time, of disadvantaged student performance. This decline is represented most frequently by a widening of the gap, longitudinally, between black student achievement and the achievement

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of white middle class students. This phenomenon of geometric decline is presumed to exist also in the case of the unrecognized and unserved gifted culturally-different pupil. Accordingly, there is presented a need to identify such gifted pupils early in their academic careers in an attempt to prevent the loss of this valuable untapped human resource. Naturally, unrecognized gifted pupils of the mainstream culture are also susceptible to begin "turned off" if they are not recognized early enough.

Difficulties of Identification. The current state of the art in the assessment of intellectual capabilities has presented a number of allegedly worthwhile instruments which purport to be relatively culture fair and/or culture free. Such devices, however, have not been put to the test in settings such as are present in the areas where the disproportionate representation of non-disadvantaged students can be attributed in large part to the fact that identification procedures utilized to date have possessed a cultural bias which is quite common in assessments of this nature. There is a need to select, and utilize in an action setting, identification instruments and plans which show promise of identifying greater numbers of gifted students in the culturally different population than has been the case to date.

GEORGIA STATE POLICY

Evidence of the State Department of Education's commitment to efforts in the area of the gifted is evidenced by the recently-formulated guidelines excerpted below:

> Intellectually Gifted Definition. Students are intellectually gifted if their potential cognitive powers, when developed, qualify them to become high-level innovators, evaluators, problem-solvers, leaders or perpetrators in the complex society in which they live.
>
> Intellectually Gifted Eligibility and Placement. For a student to be eligible for placement in a special program, he must have the potential to perform a significantly higher level than the average student. Significantly higher level refers to performance which places a student at least 1-1/3 standard deviations above the mean of the test administered. Placement must be decided by the local placement committee after careful review of a complete case study of the student, which includes data relative to student's cognitive abilities, special interests, psychological data, health status, school achievement, emotional and social maturity, creative ability, relationship to teacher and parent's observations of student.

While the selection criterion of 1-1/3 standard deviations above the mean is specified, the state guidelines make no mention of the test(s) to be used. This offers sufficient latitude to accommodate the selection and/or development of new identification devices and procedures, while still remaining within the confines of the state-established guidelines.

OBJECTIVES:

The objectives of this paper are presented below and address each of the above-identified problem areas in the same order as were the problems earlier.

- Increase significantly the number of culturally different pupils identified as gifted.
- Identify gifted students in the first grade.
- Identify and/or develop screening and identification instruments and procedures which are not as biased as current measures toward mainstream culture gifted pupils.
- Commence the operation of an early elementary enrichment program.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION:

In general, identification of the gifted has been through standardized intelligence tests and past academic achievement, with very few gifted children being located. This led to the conclusion that giftedness is largely confined to middle and upper socioeconomic children. Recent studies have suggested, however, that giftedness occurs at the lower socioeconomic levels and in culturally different children in much larger proportions than the early research indicated, and that most of these gifted children have been overlooked. Current research has dealt with the need to discover ways to identify these children and to design special educational programs which will help them achieve up to their potentials.

The debilitating effects on intellectual development and academic performance of a culturally different background have been clearly demonstrated, and these effects have proved cumulative so that a progressive decrease from year to year occurs. This process has been shown to be reversible, particularly if corrective actions begin at an early age, in which case special programming is feasible.

The first problem in building such a program is to establish procedures by which gifted culturally different children can be identified. Wechsler, Guilford, Torrance, and others have shown that intelligence and the related capacity for superior performance consists of many factors and components, and that many of these must be incorporated into any identification method. The methods which are most workable with the disadvantaged, can be applied validly and practically, and have high predictive value are unknown at present. Both the factors and the most efficient operational definitions of them must be determined through research which considers large numbers at the start and begins in an exploratory manner.

Measurements of these indices must be obtained through many different approaches. Included are open-ended tests; individually and group administered standardized measures; teacher judgments based on carefully developed and precise rating procedures and on training in use of these procedures, observations in both natural and contrived settings; child interviews; and parent interviews. The approach which is best for different factors needs to be established and some method of screening developed so that more children will be involved. The individually administered measures and time-consuming procedures should be used with only the limited number of children identified by a broad screening device.

SPECIFIC AIMS:

A central purpose of this paper is to initiate more effective procedures by which gifted children from culturally different families can be identified and to devise special educational programs through which these children can achieve academically according to their potential. The paper is based on certain propositions suggested by past research:

1. Giftedness exists in significantly higher proportions among children from culturally different families than has been generally believed in the past. Failure to recognize these children has resulted from use of inappropriate indices of giftedness.

2. Although a number of factors make the task difficult, workable and efficient procedures for early identification of gifted children from lower income families can be developed or tested where they exist. These procedures must involve many indices which are operationally defined through new techniques and approaches.

3. These gifted children have unique needs, the meeting of which is directly related to the quality and quantity of their academic performance. These needs can be identified and met so that the children overcome the depressing effects of a culturally different environment and achieve at a level in accordance with their capabilities.

Devising identification procedures and building special educational programs depends on obtaining answers to these questions:

1. Which of the many indices of giftedness discovered in past research are useful in early identification of giftedness among the economically and culturally deprived? Are new indices needed?

    a. How are these indices manifested among these children? In what ways do their peculiar life experiences modify the operation and exhibition of these indices?

b. To what degree do measures of the different indices correlate with academic potential? Which combination of index measures provides the best prediction of academic potential?

c. Which indices can be combined into a screening device which easily applied, economical of time and effort, and yet efficient in selecting children who should be more thoroughly examined for giftedness?

These questions need to be addressed in evaluating the aims and objectives of any project. The procedures and program design which follow are designed to try to provide answers for each of them.

ELEMENTS TO CONSIDER:

1. Identifying the students with appropriate and multiple criteria.

2. Understanding the patterns and values of the students' culture.

3. Recognizing the characteristics unique to the gifted or talented within the subculture and the similarity of traits which are shared with the gifted and talented within the dominant culture.

4. Planning and providing educational opportunities for the culturally different child which match and support his culture rather than attempt to make him give up his culture to become a member of the dominant culture.